

CLAIMS

1. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method comprising:

establishing a network of computerized item dispensers, each dispenser containing

5 inventory;

establishing a computer data center, the data center being in electronic communication with the network;

establishing allocation codes within the data center, the allocation codes limiting the extent to which inventory is allowed to be withdrawn from the dispensers;

10 identifying a user at one of the dispensers; and

allowing the user to reconfigure the allocation codes from the one of the dispensers.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

15 prompting a user to enter a login allocation code.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

displaying a user-specific default value for an allocation code.

20 4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

prompting a user to enter a product allocation code.

5. The method of claim 4, further comprising:

prompting the user to remove a quantity of items; and

25 prompting the user to enter a quantity of the removed items.

6. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method comprising:

- determining a user;
- 5 receiving a request for an item from the user;
- determining an item inventory based on the request;
- determining whether a special order is necessary based on the item inventory; and
- directing the user to a customer-pre-determined merchant for the special order.

10 7. The method of claim 6, wherein the customer-pre-determined merchant is a web-based merchant.

8. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method comprising:

- 15 determining a user accessibility;
- receiving at an item dispenser a request from the user for an item;
- determining whether the item is present at the point-of-use item dispenser;
- searching whether the item is present at a secondary item dispensers when the item is not present at the point-of-use item dispenser; and
- 20 displaying the secondary item dispenser when the item is present at the secondary item dispenser.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising:

- prompting a user to select an item from a scrolling list if more than one item is
- 25 present at the secondary item dispenser.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising:
flashing the secondary item dispenser when the item is selected.

5 11. The method of claim 8, further comprising:
prompting a user to special order when the item is not present at any secondary
item dispenser.

12. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method
10 comprising:
determining a user accessibility;
determining whether an item is to be checked in or out by the user;
assigning a loan period when the item is checked out by the user;
configuring a first customer-pre-defined time period when the checked-out item is
15 delinquent; and
assigning the checked-out item a consider-consumed status when the checked-out
item is not returned after a second customer-pre-defined time period.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
20 charging the consider-consumed item to the user.

14. The method of claim 12, further comprising:
notifying the user of the loan period when the user logs in.

25 15. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

preparing reminders and reports on a delinquent user.

16. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method comprising:

- 5 determining a user accessibility;
- determining a defective return location based on the user accessibility at the point-of-use; and
- returning a defective item to the defective return location.

10 17. The method of claim 16, further comprising:

 designating a quantity of the defective item.

18. The method of claim 16, further comprising:

 allowing an authorized user to unload the defective items.

15 19. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method comprising:

- determining a user accessibility;
- designating an item as a market research item;
- 20 determining whether the market research item is removed by the user;
- generating a market research response; and
- communicating the market research response to the user.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the market research response is a survey.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein the market research response includes displaying a video advertisement.

22. The method of claim 19, wherein the market research response is a receipt.

5

23. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method comprising:

determining a user accessibility;

determining a user-specific work type based on the user accessibility; and

10 assigning a consumption quota based on the user-specific work type.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the consumption quota defines a quantity of items to be checked out.

15 25. The method of claim 23, wherein the consumption quota defines a customer-defined check out period.

26. A method of tracking an item dispenser inventory at a point-of-use, the method comprising:

20 determining a user accessibility;

determining a user-defined consignment session based on the user accessibility;

and

marking a consignment inventory when there is a transaction during the consignment session.

25

27. The method of claim 26, further comprising:
reporting the consignment inventory.